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MISTAKEN

BY

Annie S. Swan.

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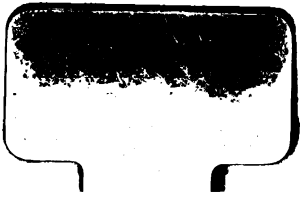

The Christian Life Series.

MISTAKEN.

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BY

ANNIE S. SWAN,

AUTHOR OF "ALDERSYDE."

EDINBURGH:

OLIPHANT, ANDERSON & FERRIER.

1883.

251. g. 954.

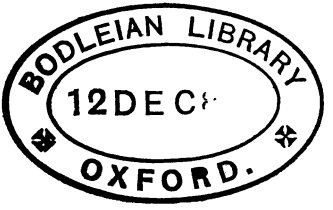
Edinburgh:

PRINTED BY LORIMER AND GILLIES,

FOR

OLIPHANT, ANDERSON & FERRIER.

LONDON : HAMILTON, ADAMS AND CO.



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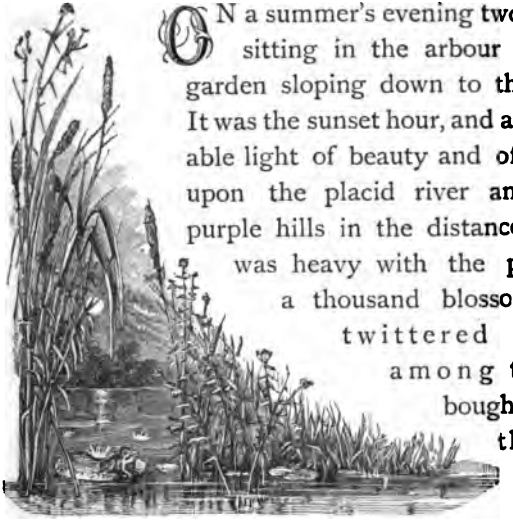
MISTAKEN.

CHAPTER I.

DO THE DUTY WHICH LIES NEAREST TO THEE.



ON a summer's evening two girls were sitting in the arbour of a large garden sloping down to the Thames. It was the sunset hour, and an unspeakable light of beauty and of peace lay upon the placid river and on the purple hills in the distance. The air was heavy with the perfume of a thousand blossoms; birds twittered drowsily among the lilac boughs; and even the humming of the lazy bees sometimes mingled with the pleasant evening sounds.

It was a beautiful picture—one to engross the eyes and to gladden the heart. The occupants of the arbour were not unappreciative of nature's handiwork; but they were at that moment so absorbed in conversation that the picture, gilded by the sunset, passed unnoticed.

They were young girls in the first blush of womanhood, but widely different in appearance and in disposition; yet they were friends—knit together by the warm enthusiastic ties of a school-girl attachment, which they had sworn would remain unbroken and unclouded through all the changing future which lay before them.

The elder of the two was of tall and graceful figure; her face was dark in hue, and the features strongly marked. It was a striking face in many ways, and indicative enough of the nature of its owner. Maud Evendon was a woman with a will, one who held pronounced opinions of her own, and who was not accustomed to allow trifles to stand in her way.

The other was a sweet and gentle-looking girl, with soft brown hair rippling back from a pleasant girlish face; just such a one as you can see any day in an ordinary English home.

"Well, Daisy—I think I must drop that childish name now that we are both come to woman's estate; so, Margaret, my friend, to-morrow we part, but we will still be united by the great work in which we both are engaged, and we shall see each other often, I promise you," said Maud Evendon, her dark eyes dwelling searchingly on her friend's face.

"I am almost sorry to go, Maud," said Margaret Wayland, regretfully. "At home I shall not have the stimulus I have here. Papa is engrossed in business; mamma worried and anxious continually about household affairs; Lucy, besides being too young to be a companion to me, is bound up in her music; and my brother Tom is a perfect hurricane—always in scrapes, always whistling, and shouting, and making fun. There will be no peace there for the quiet meditations we have had; no retirement to fit me for the mission work I intend to do outside."

Maud Evendon thought a moment before she spoke.

"The difficulties you will have to contend with will make your sacrifice for the Master greater," she said, by-and-by. "You will just need to content yourself with inward meditation and inward retirement when

the outward is denied you. And at the mission meetings you will find more stimulus than I can give you."

Margaret Wayland shook her head.

"Another thing, Maud; I almost fear, nay I am sure, mamma will expect me to do a large share of house work, and to assist with the children's lessons as well. It has cost papa something, you know, to keep me so long at The Willows, and I am nearly sure he will expect me to turn my education to advantage at home. How pleasant it must be to be rich like you!"

Maud Evendon glanced complacently back at her beautiful home, the unmistakable abode of wealth and taste, and then made answer carelessly:

"It certainly relieves one of sordid cares, which are such a hamper to spiritual life; but, Daisy, surely your mamma will not expect you to hide your talent in a napkin, like the unprofitable servant. When you explain to her your noble aspirations to do a great work for the Master, when you show her the absolute need there is to go down among the lowly to assist in evangelising the masses, she will be proud and willing to encourage you in every way, will she not?"

"I do not know; I hope so," returned Margaret Wayland, doubtfully.

"Is she not a Christian, Daisy?"

"Mamma!"

Margaret Wayland's thoughts flew to her home, picturing there the sweet, saintly face of her mother, recalled her perfect abnegation of self for those she loved, her constant never-ending labours, physical and mental, for the comfort and well-being of the household, and her face flushed painfully.

"I beg your pardon, Daisy," said Maud Evendon, hastily, "I did not mean to hurt you, dear. What I meant was that she may not be enthusiastic about the salvation of others. She has so many other claims upon her time, it could not be expected from her. But surely she will not seek to crush your ardour, to damp your eager desire to work in the Lord's vineyard, to hamper the labour of your hands?"

"Mamma's heart is in every good work, Maud," said Margaret Wayland quietly. "But she says very little at all times. She is a reticent woman, and does not show her feelings on every occasion."

"I see. Well, Margaret, let us go over your arrangements. Living in Dalston, Hackney will, of course, be your field. Charity must begin as near your own door as possible. You will connect yourself with the mission-station in Hackney, and the superintendent will speedily fill your hands. Your chief work will be house-to-house visiting, and pressing the poor unhappy people to come to the mission-meetings. Have you any idea of how the work is carried on there?"

"Just in the usual way, Maud," said Margaret, the momentary cloud passing from her face, for her friend's words roused all her deep-seated interest, "I made some inquiries when I was at home at Christmas. There is a mission-hall, with a superintendent and a staff of workers from Dalston and the neighbourhood. There is a large choir too, which I shall join."

Maud nodded in satisfaction. "That is all right; your way is plain. Well, Margaret, it is a great thing to be done with school and school-girl things—a grand thing to feel oneself to be a woman, with a woman's responsibilities, a woman's work to do for God."

That Maud Evendon deeply felt what she said was evidenced by the emotion on her face.

Margaret Wayland's grey eyes filled with tears.

"To be able to save one soul, Maud—even one—what a privilege, what a joy!" she whispered.

"It is in comparison with the flimsy happiness arising from the life of gaiety and carelessness which Isabel and the rest promise themselves. Ours is the deeper, truer happiness, Margaret."

"Well, ladies," said a pleasant manly voice in the doorway, "shall I be *de trop*, or are the feminine secrets all discussed?"

The face of Margaret Wayland flushed like the deepest tint of the apple-bloom; but Maud looked slightly displeased.

"You are so flippant, John," she said with dignity. "You often forget, I think, the seriousness befitting one in training for the ministry."

"And you, sister mine, have laid aside too soon that natural gaiety that is the chief charm of girlhood," said John Evendon, teasingly. Then he added, "Mamma sent me for you, Maud; she wishes to consult you about a letter which has just arrived. Miss Wayland, you need not go yet."

"No; stay. I shall not be many minutes, Daisy,"

said Maud; and the next minute Margaret was alone with her friend's brother.

He was a manly fellow. These words best describe him. There was a conscious strength of noble manhood in every gesture, in every turn of the fine head, in every glance of his honest eyes. He was one of those who make young manhood so beautiful a thing —pure, and true and upright, unflinching in condemnation of all evil, unflinching in performance of duty to God and to his fellowmen—yet John Evendon was as sunny-hearted and merry a young fellow as ever made stir in a house. His song was the first in the morning and the last at night. He was a living refutation of the doctrine that religion is a dark and gloomy thing; yet his religion was the mainspring of his life, which had prompted him to choose the Christian ministry as his profession. He stood a few minutes looking in silence upon the downcast face of his sister's friend, thinking it the sweetest he had ever seen. In his eyes lay something of the deep, true, tender love which stirred his heart; but the time for him to speak had not come yet.

"The moon is rising, is it not?" said Margaret

Wayland, rising at last, and speaking with an effort. "I like to watch it gleaming on the river."

"Come, then, we can go along the bank a little way," said John Evendon, quietly. "Maud will guess where we have gone, and overtake us."

So in silence they turned together from the arbour and took the path by the river side.

"You go home to-morrow, I believe?" said John Evendon.

"Yes, mamma is wearying now, Mr. Evendon," answered Margaret. "I have been here nearly a fortnight, you will remember."

"Is it so long as that?" exclaimed John Evendon. "It has seemed but a few days, Margaret."

The colour deepened on her cheeks, and he felt the light fingers tremble on his arm. It was the first time her beautiful name had passed his lips.

"This will not be your last visit to Evendon," said John. "We will see you with us again very soon, I would trust, when there is only the breadth of London between us."

"I do not know, Mr. Evendon. I shall be very

busy, I expect, at home. My holiday-making is over. I am a woman now."

John Evendon glanced down with a smile at the girlish figure by his side, but made no remark. By-and-by they reached a rustic bridge, and unconsciously both stood still. The light of day was dying slowly, and away above the roof-trees of the great city the summer moon was rising. Its light enveloped them, touching very tenderly the sweet face of Margaret Wayland.

"How privileged you are to live always here!" said Margaret, impulsively. "It is easy to be good, easy to have sweet, pure, noble thoughts in the midst of such peace and beauty."

"Perhaps you are right; but I should not like spending life by this quiet river side," said John Evendon, briefly. "Will you tell me where you live, Margaret? Will you give me your address in so many words?" he broke off, suddenly.

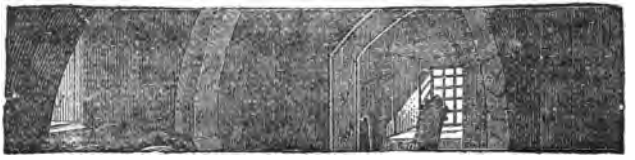
"Yes," she said, in a very low voice. "18 Wilbur Road, Dalston."

"Thanks; I shall not forget it," returned John, very quietly, and then followed a long, long silence.

"Margaret, shall I be welcome at 18 Wilbur Road?" said John, by-and-by, still quietly, though his head bent a little eagerly towards her.

After a little she turned her head, and lifting her sweet eyes to his, answered simply—

"Yes."



CHAPTER II.

MARGARET AT HOME.

"YOU are tired, mamma."

"Yes, dear; my head aches, and the heat is oppressive."

The speakers were mother and daughter sitting together in the shabby dining-room of No. 18 Wilbur Road, Dalston. Mrs. Wayland had thrown herself into an easy chair, and her head leaned back very wearily on the cushion. She was a woman in her prime, but worn and aged before her time. Her face was very sweet, but careworn, and shadow-lined about the eyes and mouth, telling of physical weakness bravely, quietly borne; telling, too, of anxious, never-ending worry, which only the mother of a family, the mistress of a home, can know.

Lucy had been practising at her beloved piano, but she had risen when her mother entered, and, after looking fondly and anxiously at her face for a moment she walked over to the window and stood looking out a little while in silence.

She was a slight, somewhat fragile-looking girl of fifteen years, with a sweet, fair face lit by shining earnest blue eyes. A great shadow lay in their depths at that moment, for a strange fear had crept into her heart when she saw the sharp pained-looking face of her mother.

"Mamma, I don't think it is right for Margaret to go out so much," she said slowly, for it hurt her even to seem to be censuring others. "There is the mothers' meeting in the forenoon, the visiting in the afternoon, and the mission at nights; why, that is nearly all day."

"Margaret thinks it her duty, dear," said Mrs. Wayland, gently; "and her whole heart is in the work, which is certainly a noble one. I have not the heart to bid her stay. Perhaps I counted too much upon her help before she came home."

Lucy was silent, thinking many things, but not caring to utter them. By-and-by she stole to her

mother's side, and laid her gentle arm about her neck.

"Mamma, let me leave school," she said, with a sob; "let me give up my music and help you. I could do some little things, surely, to help Ellen and you. Do let me, dear mamma. I am sure you are very ill, you look so white."

For a moment Mrs. Wayland let her tired head lean against Lucy's tender arm, her eyes dim with tears; but she shook her head at last and answered—

"My dear, you are kind and thoughtful; but even if I could let you neglect the gift God has so unmistakably given to you, you have not the strength for house work. It is only the heat, dear. I shall be all right if the cool days were here again. Run, now, and play me something low and quiet, and I shall get a nice rest before the roughs come in from the park."

Lucy slowly went to the piano, and, touching the keys with true musician's hands, brought forth sweetest and most exquisite melody; but her tears were falling all the while. That indescribable look on her mother's face could not be banished from her memory.

Suddenly the opening of a door, a clear, sharp, shrill

whistle, and a boyish tread in the hall, announced the entrance of "the hurricane," as his sister Margaret termed him; in other words, the stalwart eldest son of the house—noisy, boisterous, impulsive, warm-hearted Tom Wayland, whom everybody liked, and who teased everybody, without respect to person, rank, or age.

"At the hurdy-gurdy again, Lucy?" he said, coming into the room somewhat after the fashion of a hurricane. "Eh, mother, tired? You look it. Where's Meg?"

"At her mission-meeting. This is Friday night, you know," replied his mother, looking with a smile into the handsome boyish face, finding unconsciously in her weakness a stimulus in his fresh young energy. "How did the Dalston Eleven behave to-night? Are they to come off victor at the great demonstration to-morrow?"

"Of course they are. Hurrah! we'll beat the Clapham Rovers all to sticks," cried Tom, flushing in his eager interest. Then suddenly breaking off, he said, soberly, "I say, mother, though, you don't look up to much. Are you ill?"

"A little tired, my boy, that's all," she answered;

and then there was a little silence, only broken by Lucy's chords on the piano.

"I say, look here. I don't know what kind of religion it is that possesses our Meg and that precious friend of hers," said Tom Wayland. "I know what I call it. She's never in the house. If you want her you've to hunt up the slums of Hackney or invade that precious mission-hall. It's all very well to teach the heathen, but there's plenty of heathen in this house. Me, for instance; and, in my humble opinion, charity begins at home."

"Your sister is in earnest, Tom," said his mother quietly. "And she does a great deal of good, I know. Perhaps it is selfish of us to grudge her in such a work; but ——"

The unfinished sentence spoke volumes.

"Won't father put a stop to it? I'll ask him this very night," said Tom.

"You will not, Tom," said Mrs. Wayland. "Besides it would be useless."

Mrs. Wayland did not say why it would be useless, but the truth was that Mr. Wayland admired his daughter's conduct, and was proud to see her spend

her time, as he expressed it, in "doing good to others, giving up all the nonsense and gaiety so many young ladies occupy their time with." He was not unkind; he loved his wife; but he shut his eyes to the fact that being "careful and troubled about many things" of which Margaret might have relieved her was breaking up her system and making the beginning of the end.

When Margaret first came home and had expressed her disinclination to teach the younger ones, he had set aside her mother's objections and said that Margaret must do as she pleased. That course necessitated the dismissal of the girl who had assisted in the kitchen, and with only one inexperienced domestic to aid her, Mrs. Wayland had her hands full —too full, indeed, for the strength which lay in them. But she never complained, and to-night, for the first time, she acquiesced in Tom's plainly expressed disapproval.

"I wish the Rev. John joy of our Meg!" said Tom, administering a vigorous kick to an unoffending chair leg. "When he comes in famished for dinner, and finds her out among the heathen, he'll know

what it is to have married a woman with a mission!"

"Hush, Tom," said his mother, reprovingly.

"I'm only speaking the unvarnished truth, mother. Meg might as well not belong to us. I saw a pretty different state of things along at Will Trent's to-night, I can tell you."

"Let us hear it," said Lucy, wheeling round on her stool.

"Oh, nothing particular, only it was so jolly to see Mrs. Trent sitting doing nothing, and Florence running round getting tea and looking after the little million Trents, and looking so jolly all the time; and taking such an interest in the Dalston Eleven, too! She's getting up a swell jersey for Will to wear on Saturday. She's worth two of our Meg, though she's not half so pretty, and can't be so fascinating as Meg can. Florence Trent's the kind of woman a man ought to marry; that's what I think. She makes her mission among her small brothers and sisters, and does more good than fifty sermons. She's just a sermon in herself. Here's the Rev. John, so I'll need to close up, I suppose."

There was a ring at the bell, and a few minutes later Ellen ushered John Evendon into the dining-room. He was not the Rev. John yet, though his studies were nearly at an end.

Mrs. Wayland rose with a frank smile of welcome and held out her hand.

"John, I am glad to see you."

These few words, the tone in which they were uttered, told in what estimation Mrs. Wayland held her future son-in-law. It was very evident that John Evendon had been made welcome by more than Margaret at 18 Wilbur Road.

"Thanks, Mrs. Wayland," said John, with his sunny smile. "Well, Lucy—laying the foundation for future fame, eh? Tom, you young lion, what a grasp you give a fellow!"

"I've been warming up to a subject, Evendon," said Tom, with a half-laugh, "and there's superfluous energy left, that accounts ——"

"What subject? Euclid or Homer, rowing or cricket—the latter, I presume?" said John Evendon, taking the chair beside Mrs. Wayland.

"None of these. Can't you guess?"

John Evendon shook his head.

"Well, I've got warmed up on the subject of your future wife," said Tom, coolly. "And my opinion is that after being weighed in the balance she is found wanting. Digest it at your leisure."

Then Tom sauntered out of the room, hands in pocket, and retired to his neglected lessons.

Lucy's face flushed, and in a minute or two she stole quietly after Tom. Then John Evendon turned a very grave face to Mrs. Wayland.

"Tom's words are sharp, but they may contain more truth than one would care to admit," he said. "Mrs. Wayland, you look very ill."

To John Evendon's unutterable astonishment, as Mrs. Wayland covered her face with her hands, he saw two tears steal out between her thin fingers.

"Yes, John, I am ill, and growing weaker every day!"

John Evendon rose and began to pace restlessly up and down the floor. It was not pleasant to be compelled to think hardly of the girl he loved, but love could not blind a man like him to actual facts.

"Margaret has failed in her duty to you, Mrs. Wayland," he said abruptly.

"I do not know. We must not judge her harshly," said Mrs. Wayland. "I am afraid sometimes to find myself grudging her work for that great cause which all Christians have at heart. It seems to me like putting myself before God. Yet He knows such a thought is very far from my mind."

John Evendon answered nothing, but his face seemed darker than its wont; the sunny glance was gone from his eyes.

"In my present state of health," continued Mrs. Wayland, "I find it impossible for me to give my younger children the training they need. I find myself sometimes even shirking the Sunday evening lesson I used to give regularly. If I have thought sometimes, John, that Margaret might give Sunday evening at least to her home, you cannot blame me. She is drifting away from us all. You hear how Tom spoke of her, and he used to worship Margaret—our Daisy, as we called her then. I scarcely know what is right and what is wrong."

"Have you ever broached the subject to Margaret?" asked John, at length.

"Often, but not lately. The last time I spoke of it

to her she said, 'Mamma, do you grudge the little I can do for God?' To that, of course, I had no more to say. What do you think, John?"

"I think this, Mrs. Wayland," said John Evendon, pausing in his walk and looking full into Mrs. Wayland's worn face, "I think that Margaret is miserably mistaken, I had almost said wickedly; but her mistake arises from an error of judgment, not from wilful wrong-doing. Her duty is here, her most sacred duty beside her sainted mother; forgive the expression, but to me your life is saintly in its abnegation of self, its angel patience, its heroic bearing of a daily cross. How much my sister Maud has to do with Margaret's mistake I dare not permit myself to think."

There was a little silence.

"Where is Margaret?" asked John, by-and-by.

"At the mission-hall. This is the juvenile temperance night, a part of the work with which she is specially interested. It is a grand work, John."

"It is," answered John briefly; "but I cannot forget that there is a charity which begins at home, and that Margaret has forgotten. I shall go and bring her home, and I shall speak to her faithfully

on this matter, Mrs. Wayland. I have shrunk from it hitherto; but my duty is plain now, for your sake."

Then John Evendon stooped and touched with reverent lips the brow of the woman whom, next to his own mother, he loved and honoured above all womankind.

It was not the lover who went forth to meet Margaret Wayland that night. It was the man and the Christian bent upon a faithful Christian errand.

CHAPTER III.

FAR ASTRAY.

T was a pleasant, heart-touching sight that crowd of eager faces gathered in the mission-hall in the High Street of Hackney. It was the juvenile night, as Mrs. Wayland had said; and the hall was filled to overflowing with young people of ages varying from five to fifteen. They were all the children of the very poor, and on the faces of some vice had already set a mark; others looked as if they had known very frequently what it was to want a meal: all were objects for compassion. It was a sight to stir even sluggish enthusiasm; and no heathen land across the sea ever presented a fairer field for earnest, self-denying missionary work.

A gentleman upon the platform was speaking to them, relating simply and earnestly the great Gospel story, and they listened with rapt attention. He possessed the rare gift of interesting young minds in his subject, and had done already incalculable good among the arabs of Hackney. A choir of young ladies were grouped about the harmonium, at which sat Margaret Wayland, her sweet face beaming, her eyes moist and tender. That she loved her work was evident from her face.

When the gentleman concluded his address, Margaret played over softly a simple tune suitable for the hymn given out, and at a sign from the superintendent the audience rose. Then followed a hearty volume of sound; every pair of lungs seemed to be in full use, every voice strained to its utmost pitch. It was not harmonious nor yet pleasant to the ear by any means, but it was hearty, and seemed to be enjoyed by the audience. When the hymn finished, Margaret Wayland turned her head, and a sudden wave of colour swept across her face, for she saw John Evendon open the door softly and slip into a seat at the back of the hall. There was something in

his face she could not quite understand, and when her eyes met his she missed the customary look of love.

She was roused by the superintendent touching her arm and asking her to go through among the children to distribute pledge cards to those who had signed the last meeting-night.

John Evendon watched her at her work, saw how well fitted she was for it; her ready smile, her pleasant word, and bright winning way made her such a favourite with the children.

If there had been no nearer, dearer claims upon her, no home duties more binding, more sacred, how it would have gladdened his heart to see his promised wife thus engaged. How sweet to know that she would by-and-by be such a true helpmeet in his ministerial work! But as it was, with the memory of the tired, ailing mother, the vision of the unruly young members of the house of Wayland retiring, perhaps prayerless to bed, he felt more and more the truth of his own words that Margaret was miserably mistaken.

It was half-past nine when the benediction was pronounced, and a committee meeting of workers

detained Margaret other fifteen minutes. None suspected that the ministerial stranger who had dropped into the hall was Miss Wayland's special friend until, when they were dispersing at the door, they saw him lift his hat to her, and then, with an indisputable air of proprietorship, draw her hand within his arm.

"I was very much surprised to see you, John," said Margaret softly, "but very glad, too. Wasn't it a nice meeting?"

"Very nice the meeting was; but I was thinking of something else."

Margaret's face flushed. Of what could he be thinking but of her? And she thought there was no need to ask the question.

"Is Maud quite well?" she asked, by-and-by.

"Yes—I suppose so. I see very little of her, almost as little as I see of you, Margaret, she being similarly engaged," answered John.

Margaret did not quite like the tone nor the words, but she allowed them to pass unnoticed.

"You would be at 18 Wilbur Road, of course?"

"I went, of course, expecting to find you there, Margaret. You knew I was coming."

"Yes; but, John, you could not expect me to neglect my work. You would not ask it from me, I know."

"We will not discuss that point just now, Margaret, as it might occupy the half-hour of our walk, and I want to speak to you on another subject."

Margaret began to feel that her lover was not in a good humour, and nerved herself for something unpleasant.

"You are cross with me about something, John. What have I done to offend you?"

"Nothing to offend; much to sadden and distress me," answered John, in the gravest tones. "Margaret, my great love for you has made me neglectful of a duty which in your own interest and in that of others I ought to have performed long ago. It was because I feared to wound my darling's heart that I was a coward, but I must speak now."

She was silent, beginning vaguely to understand his meaning.

"Margaret, I went to your home to-night, expecting, not perhaps quite unnaturally, to see you there on the only night I can spare from my studies.

Instead, I found your mother alone, save for Lucy, and too weary almost to speak to me. Margaret, that great weariness lies upon your head. In your eager desire to do work for the Master you have forgotten His command to honour father and mother before any earthly thing. You understand me, Margaret?"

Margaret Wayland drew her hand from her lover's arm, and they walked a little way in silence.

"Mamma has been complaining to you, John," she said, not softly now, but clearly and hardly; "and yet she always seems so interested in my work. If she wishes me to give it up she should say so to me in plain words, and not censure me in my absence, to you, of all people."

"Margaret!" The short, sharp, stern word made her ashamed. "I would to God my promised wife had more of her mother's spirit! It is the true spirit of Christ—humble, unselfish, patient, bearing burdens uncomplainingly, so that the ministry of pain is sanctified and blessed. You have gone far astray, Margaret."

Margaret Wayland drew herself up. She was spoken

of by her fellow-workers as the most successful of their band, the one best fitted for the mission-field, looked up to, indeed, as a model, and John Evendon's rebuke was very sharp.

"I love my mother as dearly, John, as you love yours," she said; "and if I think God has called me to a higher work than drudging in a house, am I to be reproved by you for sinful neglect of duty? It is very hard."

John Evendon looked down into the sweet troubled face, and seeing two rebellious tears trembling over her eyelashes, turned swiftly away. She was very dear to him, and it was a hard task to repress all the impulses of his heart; but his duty was very plain, and, though it was painful, it must not be shirked.

"You misunderstood me, Margaret," he said at length. "Let me tell you exactly what I think on this subject. No man has a deeper, more heartfelt admiration for your interest in missionary work at home and abroad. It is a source of great joy and satisfaction to me to see so many young ladies employing their leisure—when it is their *own*, you understand—in nobly labouring among their less-

blessed brothers and sisters. But the line has to be drawn somewhere, and I am convinced, Margaret, that your call to such work cannot be of God; because there is so plainly a more binding, sacred duty for you to do in your own house. Your mother is in failing health. Lucy, at fifteen, cannot be spared yet from school. Your father's means will not permit of his procuring additional hired help. There are three little ones unable to do much for themselves, leaving their mental and moral needs altogether out of the question. Margaret, what duty could be plainer than yours?"

He spoke with impassioned earnestness, but she kept her head turned obstinately away. How his words affected her he could not tell.

A silence ensued which remained unbroken till they reached the gate of 18 Wilbur Road.

Under the gas-lamps they paused, and the light fell full on Margaret's face. It was slightly paler than its wont, and her lips were compressed, the only sign of inward agitation.

"Good night, John," she said, and offered him her hand.

He took it in his own and bent his eyes, full of passionate love, on her face. But all he said was—

"You will consider my words, Margaret; they are the outcome of prayerful, earnest consideration."

"I will consider your words, John, you may be very sure," she answered; and withdrawing her hand, turned from him and ran lightly up the passage to the door.

For the first time since that summer night a year ago, when they plighted troth, they parted as common acquaintances part; but both hearts ached intolerably.

Margaret entered the house softly, and peeped through the half-open door of the dining-room. Her father was reading his newspaper by the hearth; Tom busy with his books at the table. Then she ran lightly down to the kitchen, where Ellen was ironing, with a great pile of linen on the board.

"Has mamma gone to bed, Ellen?"

"Yes, Miss Wayland," returned the girl, turning a very tired face to the young lady. "And Miss Lucy too. Your mamma's head was very bad to-night."

Miss Wayland winced.

"You are not going to iron all these clothes to-night, surely, Ellen? It is nearly eleven."

"I must, miss. To-morrow's Saturday. I had the children to bath myself to-night, the missus being so tired," returned the girl, quietly.

Margaret Wayland turned away. Her heart smote her, for John Evendon's words had pierced like a two-edged sword.

At the door of her mother's room she paused but did not enter, fearing she might awaken her if she slept.

When she reached her own chamber she found Lucy in bed, and fast asleep. She laid aside her hat and jacket softly, and removing her boots, opened her Bible and sat down. But her attention wandered, and suddenly her eyes were riveted by an open book lying on the mantel. She rose and glanced at it carelessly. It was the church hymnal, open at a certain page, and a pencil line was drawn round the verse of one of the hymns—

"The highest duties oft are found
Lying upon the lowest ground;
In hidden and unnoticed ways,
In household works on common days."

Margaret Wayland tossed for hours that night beside her unconscious sleeping sister, these words ringing their changes in her ears.

Were all her dreams of self-sacrifice for Christ only selfishness after all? Were her aspirations wrong—her work unblessed by the approval of God? Was it all wrong from the beginning? Had she indeed, as John said, gone very far astray? Her mind was confused, her thoughts all astray; but she fell asleep at length, with the resolution that with the morning she would go to Chelsea for a long talk with Maud. John was to be absent, she knew, and there would be no unpleasant interruption.

Time alone would tell the result of John Evendon's plain speaking.

His prayers that night were all for Margaret—that she might be guided aright, led to see that the duty which lay nearest to her was the most binding, and that home was her mission-field, calling for as much noble missionary effort as the arab population in the slums of Hackney.

CHAPTER IV.

"FOR THE LAST TIME."

"IT is advisable, nay, absolutely imperative, that Mrs. Wayland should have a change, and that immediately." So said Dr. St. Albans to Mr. Wayland one October morning after seeing Mrs. Wayland, who was now almost entirely confined to her own room.

Mr. Wayland jingled his money in his pockets and answered promptly—

"Certainly, certainly! If you say so, Dr. St. Albans, she shall have it at once. What place would you recommend me at this season of the year?"

"The west coast of Scotland, sir," answered the doctor, gravely.

Mr. Wayland looked as aghast as if he had said the west coast of Africa.

"That is *very* far out of the way, Dr. St. Albans; would no place nearer home do?"

"No," answered the doctor; "I would prefer that Mrs. Wayland should be so far away that it would be impossible to recall her should any hitch occur in the domestic affairs here."

From Dr. St. Albans' tone it was evident he thought such a possibility more than likely. He spoke, you will observe, with perfect unflinching candour, and with knowledge of the circumstances also, for he had been the family physician of the Waylands since Margaret was a baby.

"Very well; if you insist upon it, it must be, I suppose, though I don't know how it is to be managed. She can hardly go alone. Margaret cannot be spared also; nor can Lucy leave school. So——"

"Lucy must leave school," interrupted the physician, coolly; "she is the only one with whom I would trust my patient."

"Very well, very well; I leave it with you, Dr. St. Albans. I know nothing, absolutely nothing, about that part of Her Majesty's dominions, so you must make all the necessary arrangements."

"They can be made upon a few hours' notice. I have a medical friend residing in a charming part of the island of Bute. With him she would have every advantage of perfect rest, mild yet clear fine air, and the first medical skill. This is Tuesday, I shall write to him immediately. I presume Mrs. Wayland could be ready to travel on Thursday?"

"That is very soon," demurred Mr. Wayland.

"Not *too* soon, Mr. Wayland," said the physician, significantly; "there has been sufficient overwork and gross neglect, and the sooner a remedy is sought the better, I warn you."

Mr. Wayland looked slightly uncomfortable. The physician's words were unpleasantly candid.

"I hear from my wife and daughters how your eldest daughter occupies the time which ought to be spent in relieving her mother of the cares which are too many and too heavy for her now," continued the doctor, as he drew on his gloves; "and I am

astonished that you have allowed it to go on, Mr. Wayland."

Mr. Wayland's face reddened.

"I had not the heart to stop Margaret in her well-doing; and her mother never complained. You cannot deny it is a noble work she has undertaken, doctor."

A dry smile crept to the physician's lips.

"No; Mrs. Wayland would be the last to urge any claim on her own account. About the nobleness of the work there may be difference of opinion. When there is a more sacred duty lying to Margaret's hand, the nobleness of the work she has chosen becomes a matter of question. Were she mine, I should insist upon her remembering that the nearest duty is the clearest. No amount of outside labouring—no matter how devotedly it is performed—will atone for failure in duty to a mother—and such a mother!—at the day of judgment."

Having had his say, the physician clapped his hat on his head, and went his way. His last words rang unpleasantly in the ears of Mr. Wayland. At the day of judgment! What did the man mean by using

such unwarrantably strong language? As the man of the world stood there, oblivious of the flight of time, there stole into his mind a dim consciousness that he also had failed in duty towards the unselfish heart upstairs. There were unkind words, unkind deeds, carelessness and indifference to the suffering, thoughtless wounding of the tenderest feelings—ay, even the grudging giving of his means into her hands for domestic purposes—all to be accounted for at the day of judgment!

The opening of a door upstairs and a footstep coming down roused him from his reverie, and he strode out to see Margaret on the stair buttoning her gloves and dressed for walking.

"Where are you going?" he asked so harshly that she started.

"To Chelsea, to see Maud Evendon, papa," she answered. "If mamma is going away on Thursday I may not have another opportunity for long."

"You'll do no such thing; you'll stay at home, see, and look after mother! No more gadding about while she is ill!" he said peremptorily, and strode out of the house, pulling the door after him with a bang,

which set all the poor suffering nerves upstairs on edge. That was the man all over—foolishly indulgent one moment, needlessly harsh the next. But when her father spoke like that, Margaret knew she must obey, so there was nothing for it but to remove her things and go back to her mother.

"Are you not away yet?" asked Mrs. Wayland in surprise, when she re-entered the room; "you will surely miss your train."

"Papa forbade me to go," said Margaret, a little sullenly.

Mrs. Wayland looked distressed.

"I am sorry for that, dear, for as I am going away so soon, you may not see your friend for some time. I wish Dr. St. Albans had not been so imperative about this Scotch journey; I'm sure I should get well just as quickly at home."

"No, no, mamma," said Margaret, ashamed of her petulance; "and if you come back strong and well from Scotland we shall not grumble at Dr. St. Albans. Shall I help you to get up now?"

During the next two days there was so much to do indoors that Margaret found it impossible to get to

Hackney at all, and was therefore obliged to send an explanatory note to the superintendent.

The travellers went by the night mail, Mr. Wayland accompanying them as far as Edinburgh. Mrs. Wayland left her darlings with a heavy heart. Only God knew whether she should ever see them in life again; but she could leave them in His hand. "O Margaret! be good to them; fill my place, dear," she whispered passionately, as she bade her eldest daughter farewell. "Give up your meetings till I come back, and your work will be doubly sweet to you then."

"Oh, yes, mamma, I will; I will indeed!" Margaret answered tearfully. Then her mother kissed her for the last time; ay, the *last* on earth.

Out in the cab she turned to her husband and said solemnly, "Promise me, Robert—promise me that if I find myself growing weaker, instead of stronger, in Scotland—promise me you will come and bring me home. If I am to die, it must not be among strangers in a strange land, but here at home beside you and our darlings."

"I promise, Lucy," said Mr. Wayland, huskily; "but you must not talk of dying. Scotch air is to do

wonders, according to St. Albans." Mrs. Wayland smiled, but slightly shook her head, then turned to comfort Lucy, who was crying unrestrainedly in the corner. At the station, to their amazement, they found John Evendon. He gave Mrs. Wayland his arm, and wondered as he looked on the thin, sharply-outlined face, which already seemed to bear the stamp of heaven, whether he should ever see it in life again. I think she divined something of his thoughts.

"They insist upon this journey, my son," she said, calling him that dear name for the first time. "I feel very dubious about it myself, but the issues are in God's hand."

"May He be with you, dear Mrs. Wayland," John answered, his manly voice faltering; "and if it be His will, bring you back restored in health to those who love you."

"If it be His will," she repeated half dreamily; then she said pleadingly, "You will go often to Wilbur Road and see Margaret. She has promised to fill my place, and she will need your help and the sunshine of your presence."

"I will go, certainly," said John; but he turned his face away, for a shadow crossed it.

Margaret and he had drifted apart since that night when he took her home from the mission-hall, and she seemed chary of allowing him even a few minutes' private talk now. She had not found his rebuke so pleasant that she should long for a repetition of it. Sometimes John feared she was ceasing to care for him altogether, and, loving her as he did, it was a painful thought. Perhaps time, that great healer and rectifier, would in his own way set all things right.

By-and-by the minute of starting arrived, the travellers took their seats, the last good-byes were hurriedly said, and the train steamed out of the station with a great noise.

Next day Maud Evendon came to Dalston by the noon train to talk with and console her friend. She found her busy preparing dinner; but, without a moment's hesitation, Margaret left her work to Ellen, and, dressing herself hurriedly, came to the dining-room to welcome Maud warmly. She took her upstairs to remove her hat and jacket, and then,

returning to the dining-room, they settled themselves comfortably by the fire for a long chat.

Three o'clock arrived, and with it the children from school, clamorous for dinner, which was, of course, not ready for them.

By four Ellen had it on the table, and a few minutes later Mr. Wayland and Tom arrived, and the meal began. It was not a success, for Ellen, with all the rooms to clean, had not been able to bestow undivided attention on her cookery, and consequently the meat was very raw, the potatoes overdone, the vegetables boiled to soup. Tom made wry faces over his blackened pudding when it was placed on the table.

Mr. Wayland's brow was black, Margaret looked flushed and annoyed, Tom disgusted and amused; only Maud sat upright and graceful, eating the unwholesome viands with as much outward serenity as if they had been such as would charm an epicure.

All were relieved when the uncomfortable, unsocial meal was at an end, and Maud pleaded to be excused running away so soon, as she was desirous of reaching home before dusk.

"I am very sorry for you, dear," she said to Mar-

garet, in her patronising way. "You really ought to be very firm with that domestic of yours. She is evidently idle and slovenly. I should not permit a maid to appear at table attired as yours was to-day."

"She's had a good deal to do, and you know I did not help much to-day," said Margaret, faintly. "Mamma always made the dinner before, and that allowed Ellen to get through with her other work."

"I do not approve that system. The more a mistress does, the less the maid," said Miss Evendon, with a superior air. "Well, enough of these trifling matters. Margaret, what about your own special work? Is your field to lie fallow while your mother is in Scotland?"

"I fear so," returned Margaret, sadly.

"I think you might manage the evening meetings, at any rate, if you were firm with your girl. She cannot have anything to do at night, and there are only the little ones to put to bed," said Miss Evendon. "If you neglect your poor people for three months, you will find your influence very feeble when you go back. You were getting on splendidly, too. It seems a pity. Don't you think you could manage it?"

'I don't know; I'll try," said Margaret, yielding as of yore to the strong influence of her friend. "I envy you, Maud; you have nothing to hinder you."

"Always excepting John's tongue," interrupted Maud. "I wonder sometimes, minister though he be, whether he is a Christian. He is certainly a lukewarm one. You will need to imbue him with your enthusiasm by-and-by, Daisy. Good-bye."

And Miss Evendon stooped and kissed her friend, and took her leave.

There was a cross and quarrelsome trio in the nursery, to whom Margaret retired, feeling so cross herself that she had far better have left them to themselves.

"Children, do make less noise; the house is just like a menagerie," she said, sharply. "Charlie, give me that knife; you are actually whittling a chair leg."

"I won't!" said Charlie, sullenly.

"I want my dinner! I want mamma! I want just everything!" wailed Dottie, dismally.

"Mamma can't come, Dot," said Margaret, trying to speak gently, but failing. "Come to Margaret, and be good."

But the little will rebelled, and another dismal wail echoed through the house, causing Mr. Wayland to grow uneasy in his seat, and Tom to make additional wry faces at his books.

At that very moment the gentle mother, who was missed so much, was standing in a wide low window overlooking a sweet western bay, watching the moon rising above the Argyllshire hills, and the faint wondrous light stealing over the rippling water, with a great sense of peace and rest stealing over her weary heart.

"O Lucy!" she whispered, tears standing in her eyes. "It is so beautiful; I never thought Scotland could be like this. Here, if anywhere, I shall grow well and strong again. God seems to be so near, just as if I could touch His hand, when I look on such a picture."

Ay, she was coming very near to God now—soon, very soon, His hand would guide her to His home.

CHAPTER V.

THREE WEEKS AFTER.

FOR a few days Margaret Wayland, influenced by her mother's parting words, stayed indoors, and did her best to help Ellen, and fill the blank caused by her mother's absence. But very soon the old restlessness returned; the constant craving for the excitement and variety of the work in which she had been previously engaged threatened to prove stronger than her resolution to lay it aside till a more convenient season. At all times house-work had been irksome to her. The years spent at a first-class boarding-school, among the daughters of affluence and rank, had given her ideas far above her station; and thus the mischief began. It was a mistake of Mr. Wayland's; but his eldest

daughter had ever been his favourite, and his desire to fit her for any station had over-ruled his wife's objection to such an expensive and needlessly elaborate education being bestowed on one member of the family.

The young ladies at The Willows had been permitted by their lady principal to attend meetings held by an evangelist, and at these meetings many had received a blessing. I would approach this subject timidly, for it is a very delicate one. Good had been done, as I said, but harm had been done also to young girls of nervous, excitable temperaments; and very soon Miss Balmain regretted that permission had been given to her pupils to attend the meetings.

Maud Evendon and Margaret Wayland had both been deeply impressed, and professed conversion; but I hold that their subsequent conduct proved that the true spirit of Jesus Christ had not touched their hearts. Their spiritual life could not exist in the calm, uneventful ways of a quiet life; it needed constant excitement to keep it alive. They knew nothing of that "quiet rest with God" which can be enjoyed by His children, even as that beautiful hymn has it—

> "In hidden and unnoticed ways,
> In household works on common days."

So Margaret Wayland, missing the pleasant stir and stimulus of the mission-meetings, grew positively unhappy, until she began to think it her duty to try her friend's plan, and go out to the evening's meeting. But a little would not satisfy her; and we will take a peep now, if you please, into 18 Wilbur Road, three weeks after Mrs. Wayland's departure, and see how Margaret is filling her place.

It was eight o'clock.

In the dining-room, by an expiring fire, sat Mr. Wayland, newspaper in hand; while Tom, as usual, was busy with his lessons.

There appeared to be some stir upstairs, for Dottie's dismal wailing and the angry remonstrances of the small boys proclaimed that the bathing process was going on. Ellen was a rough nurse perhaps, especially at night, when she was tired physically and mentally.

"I wish mother was back," said Tom, pushing his books away from him in disgust. It's worse than lodgings, I declare!"

Mr. Wayland sat up and began to rake the dying embers together in the fire.

"Perhaps you might go down and get some coals, Tom," he suggested mildly. "The room is getting chilly."

Tom rose, and retiring downstairs, appeared shortly carrying a few pieces in his hands.

"I wish you'd tell Meg to stay in the house," he said half savagely. "It's the least she can do when mother's away."

"Yes, I'll tell her," rejoined Mr. Wayland. "Is that someone at the door?"

"No; it's Ellen coming downstairs."

There was a knock at the room-door, and Ellen looked in, her face flushed and worried-looking.

"Please, sir, I've just come to say that you'll need to get somebody to help in the kitchen when the missus's away," she said respectfully but warmly. "It's more'n one pair of feet and hands can do, among so many. I'm sorry to give trouble, sir, but if I don't the missus'll find a pretty house when she comes home, and her was so particler."

Tom made an expressive grimace, and Mr. Wayland asked somewhat impatiently,—

"Did Miss Wayland go out early to-day?"

"She was out all forenoon, sir. Came in about one to kinder order dinner, and out again till four; it's not right nor Christian, sir; though I say it as shouldn't."

Having thus relieved her mind, Ellen retired to the kitchen, leaving the two gentlemen staring at each other blankly.

"Here's a pretty go," said Tom. "It's a toss up, father, whether you or me's to turn kitchen-maid. Hullo! there's the bell. Evendon, I bet. I hope it is."

He strode out to the hall-door, and admitted John Evendon.

It was Friday night, and unless something special interfered to prevent him, John Evendon regularly appeared at 18 Wilbur Road; but he did not always see Margaret.

He came into the dining-room, and Mr. Wayland made a sign to Tom to say nothing about the state of domestic affairs, not wishing to see Margaret appear to disadvantage in the eyes of her future husband.

For a wonder Tom took the hint and held his peace.

But John's eyes were quick to note Margaret's absence, quick to notice the lack of womanly supervision in the house.

"Margaret will be at Hackney, I suppose?" he said at length.

"Yes, at the mission-meeting," said Mr. Wayland, trying to speak naturally and pleasantly.

Tom kicked the fender vigorously.

"Mission-meeting! I hate the very word. We haven't had a decent meal since mamma went away, Evendon, and I am reduced to the humble but useful occupation of scullery-maid. And just see the house; it's worse than seaside lodgings at Ramsgate," said Tom, looking round with an expression of extreme disgust.

Mr. Evendon made no remark, but in a moment adroitly turned the conversation into another groove. All grew interested; Tom forgot his grievances, and the clock hands moved round to ten.

"It is time I was taking my leave," said John, when the hour struck; but if you will permit me, Mr. Way-

land, I shall wait and see Margaret. I want a few minutes' talk with her, and my opportunities are very limited."

"Certainly, certainly!" said Mr. Wayland heartily; and when by-and-by they heard the key turn in the outer door, and Margaret's light foot in the hall, he motioned to Tom, and they retired together to Mr. Wayland's business-room.

Margaret ran upstairs, threw off her hat and jacket, and came down to the dining-room to her lover. He was standing leaning against the mantel, with his back to the door, but turned at her entrance and looked at her. She was very fair, and the blush on her cheek might have shamed the bloom of the peach. She gave him her hand shyly, murmuring some words of greeting. He held it a moment, then stooped and touched her brow with his lips.

Then they stood in silence for a little—an awkward silence, at least to Margaret.

"Did you walk from Hackney alone, Margaret?" asked John, by-and-by.

"Yes. I am not afraid."

"Perhaps not; but I am. It is not seemly for a

lady to be out after ten. I shall require my promised wife to give me a pledge that this will be the last time it will happen."

Her face hardened, and she moved a little farther from him, but made no answer.

"Margaret, I have waited beyond my usual time to-night because I felt that many things required to be cleared up between us. The existing state of things is not satisfactory to me. Is it to you?"

"I have not thought of it," she answered quietly.

An exceeding bitter smile touched John Evendon's lips.

"A pleasant assurance for a lover, truly," he said. "From that I infer that your feelings towards me have undergone a change."

Her face flushed, and her eyes filled; but they were averted, and he did not see the tears.

"Margaret, your dear mother is sorely missed in this house," he said, changing the subject somewhat abruptly. "From outward appearances, and from some stray words of Tom's, I gather that you have not considered your promise made to her sacred."

Still Margaret never spoke.

"Margaret, my darling, be guided by your better impulses! Give up your own pleasure, and make this house your field of labour—at least for a time," said John, passionately. "It breaks my heart to hear you spoken of as Tom speaks of you."

"My own pleasure?" said Margaret, slowly; "say, rather, leave these perishing souls to their fate. Oh! I know what you would say—leave the work to others. That is the constant cry. Let others do it. Shift the responsibility on to your neighbours' shoulders. The time is gone when such excuses will avail, John Evendon."

A look of pain crossed John Evendon's face. She spoke with such passion he could not doubt her earnestness. Oh no, she was in dead earnest, the slave of an unwise zeal, blinded by enthusiasm; blind to her most sacred duties, neglectful of the work which God had assuredly set for her to do.

"I pray God, Margaret, that in time your eyes may be opened," said John, solemnly. "Perhaps nothing short of a great sorrow would be sufficient."

There was a long silence; then slowly Margaret began to draw her engagement-ring from her finger.

"Since you are so thoroughly dissatisfied with me, John," she said with perfect calmness, "it will be better for us to part at once. It was a mistake from the beginning; for I see now that we could never hope to agree on many points where perfect union would be absolutely essential to happiness."

"John Evendon lifted the costly gem from the table and looked at it curiously. He was outwardly calm, as we can be sometimes in our moments of keenest pain.

"You willingly cancel our engagement, Margaret?" he said, looking straight into her eyes. "You return this as a token that everything is at an end between us?"

"It is you who have cancelled it," she said calmly. "No woman could be so constantly reproved and found fault with without seeking the reason. Perhaps you will yet find the paragon of housewifely accomplishments which I have failed to prove myself in your eyes."

Could that be Margaret speaking? Could these words be falling from the sweet lips of the gentle maiden he had wooed and won little more than a

year ago? John Evendon took out his pocket-book and put the ring into it.

"How little you have cared for me after all," he said. "It is well what is so terrible for me sits so lightly on your heart. Good-bye, and God bless you! You *were* my darling. I shall never forget it."

He came near to her again, took her to his heart, and kissed her many times. Then he went away. When the door closed upon him she turned, and, stretching out pleading hands, murmured brokenly and longingly—

"John, John! O John, come back!"

But he was gone.

With her own hands she had put her happiness away from her, and only the darkness of the night remained.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. WAYLAND SENT FOR.

HAT'S come over Evendon this long time, Margaret?" asked Mr. Wayland, one evening a few weeks after the event of the last chapter.

Margaret's face flushed, and then she grew pale almost to the lips.

"He will not come back any more, papa," she answered in a low voice, and kept her face turned away.

"Not come back any more!" repeated Mr. Wayland, excitedly. "Why, you don't mean to say, girl, that it's all up between you?"

"Our engagement is at an end, papa," said Margaret, more calmly.

A flush of anger overspread the face of Mr. Wayland, and he started from his chair.

"What insane piece of folly is this?" he exclaimed. "Your engagement at an end, forsooth; and whose blame is this, I'd like to know? Yours of course."

"It was a mutual affair, papa; do not say any more about it, if you please."

"Say! not say any more about it, indeed, when you have thrown away a settlement in life few girls in your position, my lady, ever get the chance of!" fumed Mr. Wayland. "John Evendon will be primate of all England yet, I prophesy. What did I spend so much on your education for if it was not to fit you for some such position, and you to fling it up after it was yours! It is unheard of folly—preposterous, perfectly unbearable."

Margaret, trembling from head to foot, was obliged to stand and let the storm have its way.

"I'll write to Evendon. I'll say you're sorry, and that you'll do better in the future. I know very well it's the gadding about he objects to," said Mr. Wayland, saying whatever came uppermost in his mind, without regard to propriety or anything else.

But Margaret turned to him suddenly, calm and self-possessed as a queen, and said sharply—

"You will not, papa. You forget what you are saying. I repeat, our engagement was broken by mutual consent, and can never be renewed."

"Then all I can say is that you are a pair of fools," retorted Mr. Wayland angrily, and went off to write a letter to his wife.

Its contents, you may be very sure, were not calculated to raise the spirits of the invalid, nor yet to reassure her regarding the state of affairs, domestic and otherwise, in the home which was never a moment absent from her thoughts.

Her answer came in a day or two—not to Mr. Wayland in the first instance, but to Margaret. Her reference to the broken bond was as follows—

"Your mother surely is not asking too much," she wrote, "when she seeks to be told the whole truth regarding this matter. I gave my daughter to John Evendon, so cheerfully, so joyfully, so *thankfully*, Margaret, knowing what he was, that I cannot realise just at once that all my hopes are at an end. Nor can I understand it; John loved you, and his love is

not a thing of fancy, to be set aside in a moment or by a trifle. Therefore I am compelled to believe, however sorrowfully, that the blame must be with you. Oh, my child! examine yourself; see wherein you have failed in duty or in love towards him, and make amends before it is too late. It would be an unspeakable comfort to me, Margaret, in my last days to know that I could leave one at least in such safe keeping. I say 'last days' advisedly, because I am no better, but growing weaker every day."

Margaret Wayland wept bitter tears over that letter, but she could not answer it. Day after day in that lovely island home Mrs. Wayland looked for the news which never came. But at length there arrived a long and closely-written epistle from John Evendon. I need not transcribe it here. It was manly, like the writer, and every line of it breathed love for Margaret —love, too, for the dear mother who was so often in his thoughts. From it Mrs. Wayland gathered that John had no intention of relinquishing all hope of winning the only woman he had ever loved; but he thought it wise that they should be apart for a time. "Margaret will learn to read her own heart by-and-

by," he concluded, "and then I shall claim my wife."

That letter was like balm to Mrs. Wayland's troubled heart; and from the very hour of its arrival Lucy saw peace—unutterable peace—on her mother's face.

Their life at Craigmore was very quiet, very uneventful, but pleasant in all ways. Dr. Haldane and his wife proved themselves true friends, and were assiduous in their attention to their invalid guest and her sweet daughter. But, contrary to the expectation of the physicians, Mrs. Wayland's health did not improve, but as she expressed and felt it, she grew weaker every day. There was no pain, no distress of any kind, only a gradual sinking; every day a little less able to walk about, a little more easily tired, a little more inclined to lie down—ay, even in the mornings. These things Lucy noted with agony at her heart.

One morning they were together in the pleasant sitting-room set apart for their special use; Mrs. Wayland as usual lying on the couch, with her face turned towards the rippling sea, with the glory of the early sunshine shimmering on its tranquil breast. Although

it was winter now, the air of the lovely island was mild and pleasant as the spring, and even yet there were leaves and blossoms in the garden round the house.

Lucy was sitting on a stool by her mother's side, her eyes full of an unspeakable, yearning tenderness; but the lips never moved—the heart was full, too full for speech, because the truth was coming home to her so unmistakably at last. Her mother was drifting away from her, from them all, away to that unknown sea which men call death, but which God says is the "gate of life."

"Lucy!"

Mrs. Wayland turned her head slowly as she spoke the word, and there was a great light on her face, perhaps the reflection of the glory on the sea.

"Yes, mamma," answered Lucy, with a sob in her voice.

"It is time to write to papa now," said her mother, very softly. "If we wait any longer, my darling, I may not be able to go, and I want a last word with all my darlings before I go to that other brighter, dearer home we were reading of a little while ago."

"Mamma! mamma!"

Lucy's head went down upon the pillow beside her mother's, and her overcharged heart had its way. Her self-control hitherto had been wonderful in one so young; but this was more than she could bear. She was most passionately attached to her mother, whose very counterpart in all things she was. Mrs. Wayland's tears fell also, and she passed her hand to and fro on the sunny head with a tenderness peculiarly her own.

"My darling, it is better so," she whispered; "and the parting will be only for a little while," she murmured. "You know it, Lucy."

"Yes—oh, yes! but what will it be without you mamma? What will we do—what will we do?"

God only knows the agony which prompts that cry from those who watch a mother drifting from them, knowing that even for them she may not stay when angels beckon her up higher.

"God will be with you, Lucy. You know He has said, 'As one whom a mother comforteth, so will I comfort thee,'" whispered Mrs. Wayland.

But still Lucy could but re-echo the cry—

"Without you, mamma, what will we do? There

will be no home—nothing. God will not be so cruel."

It was long ere the sore heart could be stilled, but at last Mrs. Wayland succeeded in infusing something of her own peace into Lucy's mind.

By-and-by the letter was written—a few trembling, blotted words, but which were unmistakable in their meaning.

Dr. Haldane did not demur when Mrs. Wayland communicated the nature of the letter despatched to London, but only said quietly—

"I am glad you have sent for Mr. Wayland."

Lucy's letter reached Dalston about seven o'clock on the evening of the following day.

Margaret was out as usual; Tom was along at his friend Will Trent's; and Ellen was ironing in the kitchen, and trying to keep the little ones quiet beside her. No additional help had been got, but Ellen, though always grumbling and threatening to leave, stayed on, and worked faithfully and well, all for love of her absent mistress. She carried in the letter to her master, and lingered about in the room on pretence of building up the fire, anxious to hear

the latest news of the invalid. She saw Mr. Wayland's face change, and he rose hurriedly, looking like a man who had received a sudden shock.

"Mrs. Wayland is worse, Ellen," he said hoarsely, "and she wants me to come at once and bring her home. Look out my things for me. I shall catch the mail at Euston if I make haste."

Ellen burst into tears, but ran at once to do her master's bidding, and in half-an-hour he was ready to go.

"Tell Tom and Margaret when they come in, you know, and be sure to have things all right and comfortable when we come home. I'll telegraph when you may expect us," he said, pausing at the door. "Good-night."

Ellen went back to the kitchen, laid aside her ironing materials, and took the children up to bed. While she was thus engaged Tom entered the house, and was susprised to find the dining-room empty.

"Has my father gone out, Ellen?" he shouted from the foot of the stair.

Ellen came running down, with her apron to her eyes.

"He's away to Scotland, Mr. Tom," she said, fairly sobbing now. "There was a letter from Miss Lucy, an' the missus is worse, an' wants to come home."

Tom Wayland turned and went back to the dining-room again, shutting the door behind him. He sat down there mechanically, and dropped his head in his hands. It was better that he should be alone, best that the first agony of his grief should be witnessed by God alone. It needed all his young energy to battle with it; but it mastered him, and he fell down upon his knees. His angel mother dying—O God, it could not be! Ay, but it was. By-and-by from his lips there fell a prayer, such as is wrung from human hearts in direst need—

"O Lord! spare her; we cannot do without her in this miserable home. Let her live, for Christ's sake."

Ah, Tom! many another petition as earnest, as agonising, as heart-felt, God has heard and answered, but in His own way.

Margaret Wayland returned home about her usual time—a little after ten. She looked into the dining-room on her way through the lobby and saw Tom

sitting with his head down on his hands. He was alone.

"Where's father?—what's the matter?" she asked faintly.

He flung up his head and looked at her with pain-dimmed eyes.

"Away to Scotland for mother. You know what that means, I suppose?"

"No. Is she worse?"

"Yes; dying, I suppose, or coming home to die. There was a letter from Lucy. Let me pass. I must go outside, or I'll go mad or something."

He pushed past her, caught his cap from the stand, and went out into the night.

And Margaret?—With a gnawing pain at her heart she crept upstairs.

CHAPTER VII.

SUNSET IN BUTE.

RS. WAYLAND is too ill to travel."

With these words Dr. Haldane met Mr. Wayland on his arrival at Craigmore.

Mr. Wayland looked at him blankly.

"Too ill to travel? Oh, nonsense! She must travel. She will be better at home. She ought never to have left it. I wish St. Albans and the rest of you were at the bottom of the sea."

Dr. Haldane's face never changed. His profession brought him into contact with all manner of men, and Mr. Wayland's type of character was familiar enough to him. He held his peace, knowing by experience it was the better way.

"Is she able to be up?" asked Mr. Wayland at length.

"Not to-day. I need not hide the matter from you, sir," returned the doctor, gravely. "There has been a sudden and unexpected development of the disease, and your wife is sinking fast."

Mr. Wayland controlled himself with wonderful firmness.

"I may see her, I suppose?"

"Yes. Your daughter is with her now. She went to prepare her for your arrival. Will you come upstairs?"

Mr. Wayland turned and followed the physician like a man in a dream. On the first landing there was the soft opening of a door, and Lucy came out weeping. In a moment she was clasped to her father's heart, and the physician turned aside for a little.

At length all three entered the room. Mrs. Wayland was in bed now, leaning in a sitting posture among her pillows. She did not look very ill. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes bright—ah, unnaturally bright—too surely foreboding the coming end.

Mr. Wayland was not a man of deep feelings, but

there were unwonted tears in his eyes when he stooped to kiss his wife.

"I have come for you, Lucy," he whispered; but she shook her head, smiling slightly, and pointed upward. Lucy ran sobbing from the room, and Dr. Haldane paused only to ask that she might not talk too much, and then left husband and wife together.

"I am glad you are in time, Robert," said Mrs. Wayland. "It will be only a few days now."

Mr. Wayland covered his face with his hands and groaned. In the presence of her sweet serenity the words of bitter complaint he would have uttered were hushed.

"It was very hard at first to think of dying so far from home," she went on softly. "And to think that it will be only in heaven I shall meet my darlings again. But God has made it all right—all right."

Her repetition of the words, her smile of perfect peace, made the worldly man beside her marvel. He was what the world calls a Christian, but the religion which prompted such words as these from the heart and lips of a dying woman was altogether a sealed book to him.

"There are only a few things, Robert—a very few things—I wish to say, and then my mind will be at rest. The first is about Margaret. I feel that I have not been firm enough with her. I have allowed her to neglect her home duties, and so unfitted her in all ways for what I hope she will yet be—the wife of John Evendon. You must be firm, Robert, but very gentle—oh! very gentle." She laid her thin hand on his to enforce her words. "She will of course fill my place. I know she will, for God will answer this, my most earnest prayer, that in their elder sister the little ones will find a mother. I will write a few words to her by-and-by, and to Tom if I am able."

She paused a moment, and the light of a great love shone upon her face, telling how unspeakably dear to that mother's heart was her first-born son.

"You will let Lucy go on with her music, Robert; it is a gift we dare not neglect; but you will, above all, be gentle with Margaret. I so fear you will blame her when you review the past."

"I do blame her, but I blame myself more," said Mr. Wayland, with curious calm. "But I will be gentle with her, as you wish. God knows I have failed in my

duty to you, Lucy, and to my children, too often and too miserably to make myself a judge of others."

There was a silence, a sacred silence then, which we will not break.

At last Mrs. Wayland desired that writing materials should be brought to her, and she penned her last words to Margaret. But her strength failed her when she tried to write to Tom also, and she said she would lay it aside till to-morrow.

To-morrow she was weaker still, and could but whisper to her husband to take all her messages, her last love, to her boy.

"I want to be buried here in Bute, Robert," she said, as the day wore on. "We have nothing to bind us to an English burying-ground, and I love this place. And you will come sometimes with the children to rest a-while from the labour of life and to keep my memory green in their hearts. You will never forget me, I know."

So the day wore on.

Towards the close of the afternoon there was the bustle of an arrival downstairs. Little dreamed the trio in the sick chamber who had come. But there

were steps on the stairs by-and-by, and to the amazement of all Tom appeared on the threshold.

"I could not stay when there was no message," he said, his young voice faltering sorely. "Mother! oh, mother, mother!"

He fell on his knees by her bedside, and his face on the coverlet, unable to restrain his emotion.

So the last words were spoken instead of written. One more wish of the mother's heart fulfilled, one more added to the dear ones to watch her going home.

Yet another day on earth, yet a few more hours with those she loved, yet a few more undying memories for those who watched how a Christian could die—one of the "hidden ones" of God, who had laboured for Him in "unnoticed ways" indeed, but whom God delighted to honour with His near presence on the shore of Jordan, and to whom He would vouchsafe an abundant entrance to His home on high.

At the sunset on the following day God claimed His child. The sun was on the bay; his last beams gilding sea and sky with a glory unspeakable. She had loved that scene—had loved to watch the red light playing on the quiet water, on the shadowy

shores beyond, and on the wild slopes of the encircling hills. So because she loved it best I believe God willed that in that hour she should look her last upon the earth.

With the sunset her barque set sail upon the Jordan, and following in the sun's track reached at last that most blessed shore where there is no more sea.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARGARET'S NEW LIFE BEGUN.

A TELEGRAM! Dread harbinger of evil to unaccustomed eyes! No wonder fingers tremble before they open it! Margaret Wayland felt sick and faint when Ellen placed the brown envelope in her hands the following morning, but when she read the words she uttered a great cry, and let it flutter from her hands to the floor.

It was from Tom; a brief sentence conveying the fact, but nothing more. "Very quietly yesterday afternoon at half-past four. She will be buried here. Letter by mail."

Dead! even in the midst of anxious preparations for her coming! Dead! Gone for ever beyond reach of the voice of penitence—beyond hearing of that

exceeding bitter cry which fell from the lips of her first-born child.

I cannot linger with Margaret here. Such moments of agony are between those who bear them and their God.

It was a long time before she came to a sense of what was happening around her. The children came in for their early dinner, and Dottie's first words were,—

"Will mamma be back to-day, Margaret? Will she be here when we come in from school at three?"

Something in Margaret's set white face gave these three childish minds an inkling of the truth.

"Mamma will not come back any more, for God has taken her to heaven," she said. Then she stretched out her arms and drew them all within their shelter. "My darlings! my darlings! you have no mother but Margaret, now," she moaned; "creep close to me, my pets, I have not been a good sister to you, but oh! I will be, I will be."

So she comforted them, and that first hour drew them to her more firmly than days of ordinary life could have done.

Let me pass over the dreary days intervening between the arrival of the sad news and the return of the travellers early on the following week.

They laid their beloved dead, as she had wished, in that quiet island graveyard, within sight and sound of the sea she loved. Henceforth Scotland would no longer be only a name to them, but a dear and sacred place, because upon its shores was their mother's grave.

It was late at night when the three returned to 18 Wilbur Road. The children were in bed and asleep; Margaret in the dining-room waiting and watching alone. She was deadly pale, and her face was worn and thin, her sweet eyes dim with weeping.

She rose up when the door-bell rang, but she dared not move. They entered the house very quietly, and Mr. Wayland was the first to reach the dining-room.

He came to Margaret and took her to his heart without a word, more tenderly than he had ever done before.

"My poor, motherless girl," he said, and Margaret clung to him, feeling with unspeakable thankfulness

that, whatever its cause, her father was changed, and that in the new life already begun—the life of atonement for the past—she would have his help and love unmingled with reproach. God knew her own reproach was enough to bear without that of others, however abundantly it was deserved.

Lucy's greeting was loving and very tearful; Tom's very quiet and almost manly in its tenderness. These few days had aged him, and their influences would leave an impress on all his after life.

There was a long, long talk round the fire, sacred talk all of *her*, and with which no stranger may intermeddle. When they parted for the night, Mr. Wayland handed to Margaret a sealed envelope.

"It is mamma's last message to you, Margaret. She thought of you to the end."

Margaret took it with trembling fingers, pressed it passionately to her lips, and ran out of the room, for her control was leaving her. She stole up to the nursery, lit a peep of gas, and, sitting down by the sleeping Dottie's bed, opened the letter. Sacred as were the words I will transcribe them here:—

"My beloved, my precious Margaret, I have but

very little strength, but there are a few words which must be written, since they cannot be said, for I know now that we cannot meet on earth again. God wills that I should leave all dear to me in this world, and enter into rest—a sweet thought, my Margaret, to one who has been weary so long. I leave my home and my little ones in His hands, and afterwards to you. It is you who must fill my place; it is to you your father must turn for comfort; to you Tom must come with all his confidence now; to you Lucy and the little ones will look for the care I have given them. Oh my darling, do not fail them! Your dying mother asks you, as you hope to meet her by-and-by in heaven, to lay aside all else and make home your first earthly care. There are souls to be saved beside you,—the souls of your little brothers and sisters. God will require from you an account of these, so take heed that you be guiltless concerning them. Pray for strength, for help, for guidance, and they will be given to you, even as they were daily given to me through many years. Be loving, be wise, be faithful, be earnest in the fulfilment of daily duty, however monotonous, remembering it is done for God. That thought

will sweeten all your labours as it sweetened mine There will be many failures, many sinkings of heart, many hours dark, perhaps, with despair; but labour on, your rest and reward will be by-and-by—nay, it will be found even in the very doing of the work itself, and in the love and gratitude of those dear to you. You can fill the empty place, Margaret, and you will; and when in God's time the crown of your life will come to you again, your new life will be all the sweeter, and fuller, and more blessed because of the waiting which went before. God bless you, my own child, and John, too. He will be my son too, at the great re-union. Now, farewell, my darling, my first-born child. My heart overflows with love unspeakable. You will never forget me, and I in heaven will look down upon you—rejoicing in your joys, but not sorrowing with you in your sorrows, because in heaven there is no sorrow, and because through clearer vision I shall see all things working for good to God's children. My fingers fail me, so, my darling, farewell, until God in His great mercy permits us to meet in heaven.—Your fond and loving mother,

"LUCY WAYLAND."

Low, very low, fell Margaret's head, and these words passed her lips :—

"O Lord, forgive the past. Help me to be all she would wish. Bless the unworthy child for the sake of the angel mother. Guard and keep this desolate, motherless household, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

CHAPTER IX.

MARGARET'S REWARD.

ON a summer's evening, in the dining-room of No. 18 Wilbur Road, sat Margaret Wayland. Let us look at her, for surely no fairer, sweeter picture of womanhood ever gladdened the eyes of those who loved it.

It was the Margaret of old, yet not the same. The first freshness of her girlhood was gone, and her face was worn a little and shadow-lined about the mouth. Many cares had done their work, but many joys also had brought a deeper lustre into her lovely eyes, although tears had dimmed them often since they overflowed for their first sorrow five years ago. During these five years one other had quitted the home, and made another

link 'twixt earth and heaven. Dottie had been the first to follow her mother through the swellings of Jordan.

Margaret Wayland had nobly fulfilled the vow made that night—nobly fulfilled all her mother's hopes; and those who knew her spoke her name as men utter that of a saint.

Yet she was no saint; only a gentle, loving, unselfish Christian woman, serving God faithfully in the hidden walks of life, making home beautiful for those she loved; doing good by stealth; training her young brothers in the narrow way, and laying the foundation for noble, useful lives. Such was Margaret Wayland's life, such her work. God bless her, and all such as her! They are God's own sunshine in this weary world.

She was busy with some sewing, but her thoughts seemed to wander, and often her eyes would turn expectantly to the window, as if they looked for some one coming.

By-and-by a quick footstep sounded on the path, and the door was opened with a hand which could belong to but one being, and that was Tom.

"Meg!" he shouted.

"Here, Tom," she answered; and in a moment he was in the room, and had her in his arms.

"Hurrah! here I am. Thomas Bertram Wayland, M.A.! Doesn't it sound well?" he cried, in the boyish tones of old, though he stood six feet in his stockings now. "Sit down, old lady, and let me look at you. Here's the trophies of the war."

"I was beginning to think you would not be till to-morrow," said Margaret. "Papa went back to the city, sure you would not come. Lucy is practising at St. Jude's; the boys are at cricket, and——"

"You are here, which is enough for me," said Tom. "Well, here you are. Three firsts, two seconds," &c. &c.

He tumbled the prizes into her lap one after the other, and then knelt down in front of her, looking up with eyes full of love into her sweet face.

"O Tom, so many! I am so pleased. Commemoration Day would be a proud one for you. I wish I had been there!"

"I wish you had! My Latin ode was lauded to the skies," said Tom, with a twinkle in his eyes. "Here, fling the books aside. They're all very well, you

know; but I want to look at you, old woman. I'm precious glad to see you!"

Margaret laid them on the chair beside her, and, stooping, touched Tom's broad forehead lightly with her lips.

Her eyes were full of tears.

"Don't, Margaret! you look exactly like mamma when you do that. It's just what she would have done," said Tom, quickly. "You have filled her place, my sister-mother."

Margaret could not speak.

"Just let me tell you here, Margaret," went on Tom, his handsome boyish face lit by a grave, beautiful earnestness, "what I have thought every day of my life for years—that whatever I am or may be in time to come I owe to you. You have been mother, sister, friend, everything in one; and if I ever forget it, ever love you less than I do at this moment, my darling, may God punish me then as I shall deserve."

"O Tom, Tom, hush!" said Margaret, trembling. "I do not deserve it. I have not been so much to you; oh, not nearly!"

"Have you not? You've been all that, and more.

You have been my guiding star in my college life, my armour against all evil. Whenever I was tempted—and there are awful temptations at Oxford, Margaret—I remembered your face, I saw you looking at me with mamma's eyes. I heard you say, as you did when I related my first and last college scrape to you, 'I am not afraid; I can trust my brother,' and so I was saved," said Tom, and rising, he took his sister on his manly breast, as if he never would let her go. "God bless you, Meg. I am a rough-and-ready fellow, but I can take God's name on my lips yet without mockery; so I say, God bless you, my sister! It is women like you who make men of us." Then he added, mischievously, "I don't need to envy any other fellow's sister now, but other fellows envy mine, instead. Hilloh, there's father!"

Both went out to the hall; but in the middle of the warm greetings Margaret stole away up to her own room and shut the door.

Her heart was full to overflowing with joy and thankfulness, and a strange, deep wonderment that God had so blessed her beyond her expectation or deserts.

This was her reward, and oh! it was sweet, so sweet that her head bowed low upon her breast, and she whispered with quivering lip, "Lord, I thank Thee from my very heart."

Ay, the mother's prayers, the mother's wish and longing had indeed been abundantly fulfilled; and Margaret was now the light and pillar of the motherless household, the joy of her father's heart, the idol of her brothers, the tender sister-mother to whom all turned for help, and care, and guidance.

So sorrow had been sanctified to Margaret Wayland, and she had come out of the deep unscathed, and was now more than ever a burning and a shining light, even in quiet places.

She had learned, indeed, to do the duty which lay nearest to her, and her reward was not denied her.

* * * * * * *

Some day John Evendon will seek again his first love; some day Margaret will be content to leave her motherless household in Lucy's care; some day a sweet southern rectory will claim its mistress; some day—but not yet.

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